



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND
ADDICTION SERVICES BUDGET PROPOSAL
PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES
FEBRUARY 23, 2017**

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron, and Members of the Committee, thank you for giving the Partnership for Strong Communities (Partnership) the opportunity to speak at this public forum and to share with you the work that we are doing to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Cindy Dubuque, and I'm the Reaching Home Campaign Manager of the Partnership for Strong Communities. The Partnership is a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut.

The Partnership staffs and manages the Reaching Home Campaign, the statewide campaign to end homelessness that is implementing the federal Opening Doors plan in CT. As you know, through an unprecedented coordinated effort of state, federal, and local partners, Connecticut was the first state in the nation to end chronic homelessness among veterans, the second state to end homelessness among all veterans and as of December 2016, has matched all those verified as chronically homeless (ie. people who have been homeless repeatedly or for long periods of time and are living with a severe disabling condition) with housing resources. We have learned that this tremendous accomplishment, once seen as insurmountable, is achievable when we invest in solutions that work.

Since January 2015, more than 1,200 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness have been housed, and are receiving case management services, which are helping them to maintain their homes. We have designed a homelessness response system across eight Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) statewide that are able to quickly identify people experiencing chronic homelessness and help them find a home within 90 days.

Your continued support and investments in ending homelessness have enabled us to coordinate a system that works swiftly and avoids duplication, while maintaining a person centered approach to care. This person centered approach means linking people to case management services and supports that enable individuals and families to connect with providers that assist them with maintaining their homes while pursuing their personal goals.

However, we recognize that Connecticut is in a place where tough choices have to be made to our state budget. We respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee support our efforts by maintaining solutions that work by preserving the DMHAS Housing Supports and services line item that funds supportive housing services, which are a critical component of keeping high need people housed and stable. Without funding for these services, we would risk reversing the substantial progress we have made in ending chronic homelessness. This could mean increases in unsheltered, high-need homelessness – taking us the wrong direction, and imposing new costs on our communities.



Research shows that Supportive Housing continues to be the most effective housing model by providing tenants both financial and case management support, and is highly effective at ending once and for all the homelessness of those who need this assistance. Housing not only saves lives, but also is saving communities up to 70% of the costs they would otherwise incur through cycling in and out of emergency services, hospitals, and jails.

The Partnership for Strong Communities and the hundreds of organizations committed to the Reaching Home Campaign/Opening Doors CT agenda are committed to sustaining the progress on creating housing stability for thousands of the state's most vulnerable and complex individuals with serious mental health and substance use disorders.. Maintaining supportive housing services is critical to keeping people who were chronically homeless stable in their housing and for serving highly vulnerable people who enter the homeless system before they reach the point of being chronically homeless.

Ending homelessness does not mean that people will never enter homelessness again. It means that we have a system in place that is able to identify, assess the needs of and find homes for those who are homeless within 90 days, and can ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

While we have much to be proud of, we know that there is more work to be done. In order to maintain the gains we have made, and to reach our goals in the future, it is imperative that we preserve the critical investments our state has made thus far. Together we can help everyone have a safe affordable place to call home.

